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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [NATO](#) [LO](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OBSITNIK'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT  
GASPAROVIC

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (C) Summary. In an one-on-one meeting conducted in Slovak on March 19, President Gasparovic stressed the importance of strong U.S.-Slovak and U.S.-EU ties; urged a NATO agreed approach to missile defense; and expressed concerns about the potential precedent Kosovo sets for Slovakia's Hungarian minority. Gasparovic stressed that it would be difficult for Slovakia to recognize Kosovo for this reason, but acknowledged that the best path forward for Serbia would be to let Kosovo go and turn its focus toward the European Union. At Ambassador's urging, Gasparovic suggested that national caveats on Slovak troops in Afghanistan might be changed, but he did not make a commitment. End Summary.

NATO/Afghanistan  
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12. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik expressed appreciation for the growing Slovak contribution to ISAF, but urged President Gasparovic to consider lifting national caveats, which are inconsistent with NATO responsibilities. Gasparovic responded that Slovakia wants to "be a full partner in NATO," and suggested that, over time, caveats might be changed. The Ambassador also urged Gasparovic to advocate for more robust defense spending to move Slovakia closer to the NATO benchmark of 2 percent of GDP. President Gasparovic acknowledged the need to invest more, but cited competing demands for education and healthcare programs. Gasparovic endorsed the Ambassador's suggestion that it would be useful to emphasize to the Slovak public the progress that has been made possible by NATO's presence in Afghanistan -- particularly in education, healthcare and employment. The Ambassador suggested that positive statements on those issues at Bucharest would be helpful.

Kosovo  
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13. (C) President Gasparovic said that recognition of Kosovo would be very hard for Slovakia. The main impetus behind Slovakia's hesitation, according to Gasparovic, are concerns about the possible precedential effect on Slovakia's (and Romania's) Hungarian minority. Gasparovic cited the close ties between Slovak-Hungarian and Hungarian politicians, noting a Hungarian initiative to give Slovak-Hungarian MPs seats in the Hungarian Parliament -- this was reduced to observer status; efforts by some Hungarian politicians in the wake of Schengen to advocate for a "Hungarian Nation," and

the desire by some in the Hungarian minority to use the Kosovo precedent to achieve such a reunification. Gasparovic made clear that he doesn't believe that this would happen anytime soon, but thinks Hungarian politicians could exploit Kosovo to keep the issue alive for the future. Ambassador Obsitnik countered that the situations in Slovakia and Serbia were not analogous and that Kosovo was not a precedent for Hungarians here. (Comment: In a meeting March 20 meeting with visiting Congressman Adam Schiff, MFA State Secretary Strofova and Political Director Buzek explicitly rejected the parallel between Kosovars and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. End comment.) Gasparovic stated that the best way forward for Serbia is to let Kosovo go and to turn toward their future in the EU.

#### Missile Defense

14. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik underscored that missile defense would benefit all of Europe and that the U.S. continued to reach out to Russia on missile defense. Ambassador noted that Secretaries Rice and Gates had had a productive consultations with their Russian counterparts, including on missile defense, on March 18. He then expressed his unhappiness with statements made by members of the coalition critical of U.S. missile defense plans and Kosovo policy. President Gasparovic sought to minimize the issue with a reference to SNS Chair Slota's occasional alcohol-fueled outbursts. Returning to missile defense, President Gasparovic expressed hope, but skepticism, that Russia would agree with the U.S. position. He was also skeptical that the Czech Republic and Poland would agree by the end of the year and added his view that Poland was trying to extract greater concessions from the U.S. Gasparovic said NATO agreement in Bucharest on missile defense would be a positive development.

#### Transatlantic Relations/VWP

15. (SBU) President Gasparovic stressed the need to further enhance transatlantic relations among the U.S., Slovakia and the EU. This was particularly important given the rise of new powers such as China and instability in other regions, e.g., in Africa. Gasparovic pledged to do what he could to further those aims. In a brief press conference following the meeting (VWP was the only topic addressed), President Gasparovic made a point of emphasizing the value of the U.S.-Slovak relationship and of the necessity to nurture it. Gasparovic told the press that progress toward VWP accession was a "good sign for our citizens, particularly for young people" and evidence of good U.S.-Slovak relations.

#### Domestic Politics

16. (C) President Gasparovic predicted that the current coalition would survive until 2010, despite what he characterized as Vladimir Meciar's constant efforts to undermine PM Fico. Meciar's HZDS is losing popular support, while Smer continues to poll strongly. Contrasting the continued unraveling of the opposition with a string of government successes -- VWP, Schengen, the Euro and strong economic growth -- Gasparovic suggested that the current coalition could continue beyond 2010.

OBSITNIK